

EDITORIAL

PTSD 30 Years On

Paula P. Schnurr

National Center for PTSD, White River Junction, VT and Dartmouth Medical School, Lebanon, NH

It is remarkable to think that 30 years have elapsed since post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was formally introduced in the 3rd edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)* (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Many people who were around in 1980, including some who were part of the process of developing the diagnostic criteria, are still in the field. Sadly, others are no longer with us. But their legacy lives on in ways that they probably could never have imagined.

Now, 30 years later, we are working on yet another revision of the PTSD diagnostic criteria, for *DSM-V*. Since the diagnosis was formulated, there has been remarkable progress in understanding trauma and its effects. The field has grown dramatically too. *DSM-III* generated a marked increase in publications on trauma, a trend that was first reported in *JTS* in 1992 by Blake, Albano, and Keane. Figure 1 depicts the number of publications on trauma in the PILOTS database (the Published International Literature on Traumatic Stress), presented as a function of their date of publication (personal communication, F. Lerner, November 2, 2009). The number of publications grew over ninefold between 1980–1984 and 1995–1999, from a mere 930 to 8,606.

This growth is due both to the creation of specialty trauma journals such as the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* as well as an increase of publications on trauma in nonspecialty journals. For example, articles on trauma comprised 16.3% of the publications in the anxiety disorders literature between 1981 and 1985, but had grown to 38.0% of that literature between 2000–2005 (Boschen, 2008). High profile-events such as the terrorist attacks on 9/11 have contributed to increased public recognition of trauma as well as greater professional interest. The number of articles on disaster increased substantially from the period in the 5 years before 9/11 to the period 5 years after by 145% in specialty disaster journals and 320% in general medical journals, with the largest increase being 2,340% in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (Kelen & Sauer, 2008). Other high-profile events—the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the bombings in London and Madrid, Hurricane Katrina, and the tsunami in Southeast Asia—have undoubtedly had a similar impact.

Internationalization is another important trend. *JTS* publications by authors from outside North America increased from 7.4% in 1988 to 34.5% in 1999 (Bedard et al., 2004), although European authors accounted for most of the growth. A more recent study confirmed these findings using Web of Science databases (Figueira et al., 2004). The number of trauma publications by U.S. authors decreased from 87.6% to 68.8% between 1983 and 2002. Almost all of the countries with increases were European (England, Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Wales), with the exception of Australia and Japan. We need to do more if we wish to see a trauma literature that reflects more diverse authorship. I believe it is critically important to find ways to increase the visibility of work coming from Third World countries in particular to ensure that our knowledge base is sufficiently comprehensive and not overly culturally bound.

I have only one more year to try to facilitate that goal in my role as Editor of the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*. My term ends in December 2010 with the publication of this 23rd volume of the *Journal*. I am pleased to announce that Daniel Weiss, PhD, is the Editor-Elect who will be taking over from me in January 2011. I will miss the work—not necessarily the workload—but I will leave knowing that the *Journal* is in good hands because I have had the pleasure of working with Daniel during my term in his role as an Associate Editor. I owe a debt of gratitude not only to him, but also to several other members of my editorial team who will be stepping down along with me at the end of the year: Deputy Editor Fran Norris, Associate Editors Sandro Galea, Nina Sayer, and Terri Weaver, Statistical Review Assistant Laurie Slone, Editorial Assistant Michele Scelza, and Production Assistant Liz Forshay.

When I became Editor-Elect in 2005, we had already been at war in Afghanistan for over 3 years and in Iraq for almost 2 years. Like many people at the time, I never envisioned we would still be at war today, much less increasing our forces serving in Afghanistan. The reality of these conflicts has been a fact of life for men and women who are serving in the Armed Forces from

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Paula P. Schnurr, National Center for PTSD (116D) VA Medical Center, White River Junction, VT 05009. E-mail: paula.schnurr@dartmouth.edu.

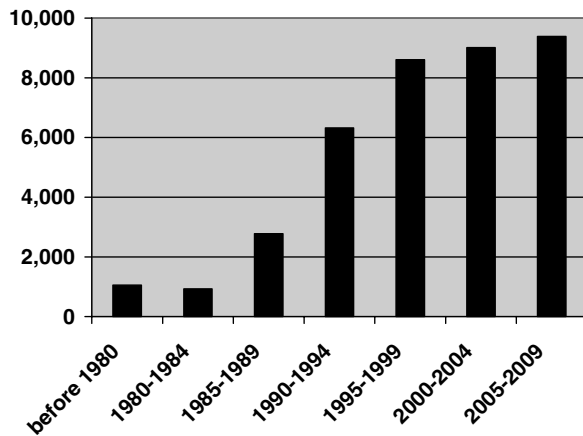


Figure 1. Number of new publications added to the Published International Literature of Traumatic Stress (PILOTS) database as a function of year of publication.

the United States and around the world, along with their families and communities, as well as the military personnel, families, and communities in Iraq and Afghanistan. We have been trying to keep the field informed of the most promising research on this topic with articles on both military personnel and civilians (e.g., Catani et al., 2009; Jackupcak et al., 2009). Within this volume, we are publishing a special issue on these conflicts, to disseminate knowledge we have gained thus far from the extraordinary opportunities we have had to study military personnel before, during,

and after their war zone service. There are great hopes that we will make real gains in understanding risk and resilience and in being able to use this information to develop better strategies to facilitate prevention and recovery. These are the key challenges for our field as we move to using *DSM-V*, *DSM-VI*, and beyond.

REFERENCES

- American Psychiatric Association. (1980). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Bedard, M., Grief, J. L., & Buckley, T. C. (2004). International publication trends in the traumatic stress literature. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 17*, 97–101.
- Blake, D. D., Albano, A. M., & Keane, T. M. (1992). Twenty years of trauma: Psychological Abstracts 1970 through 1989. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 5*, 477–484.
- Boschen, M. J. (2008). The growth of PTSD in anxiety disorder research. *Psychiatry Research, 158*, 262–264.
- Catani, C., Schaver, E., Elbert, T., Missmahl, I., Bette, J.-P., & Neuner, F. (2009). War trauma, child labor, and family violence: Life adversities and PTSD in a sample of school children in Kabul. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 22*, 163–171.
- Figueira, I., Da Luz, M., Braga, R. J., Cabizuca, M., Coutinho, E. S. F., & Mendlowicz, M. V. (2007). The increasing internationalization of mainstream post-traumatic stress disorder research: A bibliometric study. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 20*, 89–95.
- Jakupcak, M., Cook, J. W., Imel, Z. E., Fontana, A. F., Rosenheck, R. A., & Mcfall, M. E. (2009). Posttraumatic stress disorder as a risk factor for suicidal ideation in Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 22*, 303–306.
- Kelen, G., & Sauer, L. M. (2008). Trend analysis of disaster health articles in peer-reviewed publications pre- and post-9/11. *American Journal of Disaster Medicine, 3*, 369–376.